U.S. Jets Again Hit N. Vietnam

From News Dispatches

SAIGON, Dec. 28 (Tuesday) —U.S. jets hammered targets in North Vietnam today in the third successive day of raids that have marshaled most available American strike planes in Indochina.

U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine fighter-bombers, converging on North Vietnam from bases in Thailand and carriers in the South China Sea, have reportedly attacked North Vietnamese airfields antiaircraft and supply positions since Sunday.

The round-the-clock raids were said to be among the heaviest against North Vietnam since the halt in full-scale bombing of the North ordered by President Johnson in November, 1968. But military sources said the attacks could not be considered a general resumption of bombing on the pre-1968 scale.

The U.S. Command maintained its security blackout on details of the operation, sticking by its statement Sunday that the raids would conclude at a specific time, that they were against military targets and were in reaction to North Vietnamese activity endangering the dwindling numbers of U.S. troops in the South.

The command has also withheld any comment on North Vietnamese claims that five F-4 Phantom jets had been shot down and that airmen had been "killed and captured."

Hanoi Radio said two U.S. pilots were killed when their plane crashed nose first into a

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rice field after being hit by antiaircraft fire 80 miles south of Hanoi. It said a second Phantom was shot down in the same area but did not say what happened to its two-man crew.

To a Hanoi Radio claim that U.S. planes strafed a hospital and other populated areas, a command spokesman responded: "We never comment on diatribes."

A later broadcast said U.S. planes attacked "a number of densely populated areas near Donghoi town and a school in Quangbinh province."

North Vietnam's army newspaper said the raids would "prolong the imprisonment of captured American marauders."

A broadcast dispatch from Hanoi said the North Vietnamese foreign ministry issued a statement condemning Sunday's attacks and said the Americans "must bear full responsibility for all serious consequences arising from their acts."

Radio Hanoi said Monday's raids were directed against only one North Vietnamese province, Quangbinh, just north of the Demilitarized Zone, and appeared to be less intense than the raids Sunday. It made no mention of shooting down U.S. planes on Monday.

On Sunday, the raids were directed against Thanhhoa and Nghean provinces in addition to Quangbinh.

Military sources in Saigon have discouraged speculation that the North Vietnam capital of Hanoi, or the port of Haiphong have been attacked in the raids.

Military sources said the planes were bombing and strafing "a variety of military targets in North Vietnam, such as Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles, Mig (fighter-bomber) airfields, supply depots and artillery positions."

They said the primary purpose of the raids was to knock out ground and air defenses for the Ho Chi Minh Trail and military goods stockpiled alongside it for transfer into the war zone.

The sources also said that "to a small extent" the raids were in retaliaiton for the North Vietnamese downing a week ago of five F-4 Phantoms over the trail.

The Associated Press reported that 350 U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine fighter-bombers were taking part in the raids. UPI quoted military sources as saying that 200 of the 350 American warplanes in the Vietnam war theater were involved, and that the other 150 bombed usual targets in Laos, South Vietnam and Cambodia.

Meanwhile, the U.S. command said the number of American soldiers in Vietnam dropped last week from 162,500 to 158,300 last Thursday. A spokesman said it was the lowest level since October, 1965, when there were 153,300 Americans in the war zone.

Soviets Condemn U.S. Bombing Raids

Reuter

MOSCOW, Dec. 27 — The Soviet news agency Tass today condemned renewed U.S. bombing of North Vietnam as "provocative and adventuristic."

It said the raids were proof that "Washington is not giving up its attempts to solve the problem of Indochina by force."

The new raids, coupled with the "unprecedented scope" of U.S. bombing raids on Laos and new intrusions by Saigon troops into Cambodia, revealed the "hypocrisy of the claims by American leaders that they are 'curtailing the war' in Indochina," the agency said.